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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0752  
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2028  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 9064  
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7302  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5211  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3457  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 5163  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0036  
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0698  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4274  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9627  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 6921  
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0010  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3821  
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001031

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/13/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: TAMIL LEADER SAMPANTHAN FORESEES "HOT" ELECTION  
CAMPAIGN

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Classified By: DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION VALERIE FOWLER. REASONS: 1.4 (B  
, D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: In a November 10 meeting with PolChief, Tamil National Alliance Chairman Rajavarothiyam Sampanthan said President Rajapaksa told him there would be early presidential elections. He affirmed General Fonseka's intention to run but noted that a Rajapaksa/Fonseka contest would "split the army" and indicated that the election campaign would get "hot." Key steps on national reconciliation for the Tamil community included de-militarization of society, elimination of check points, and ending the Emergency Regulations. Sampanthan wanted to meet with the U.S. diaspora to stress with them the need to be pragmatic and not extreme in finding a political solution to the plight of Tamils and to encourage them to become more involved in reconstruction and economic development. END SUMMARY.

ELECTIONS: COULD GET "HOT"

12. (C) Sampanthan said President Rajapaksa recently expressed a desire to meet and they did so privately. When Sampanthan asked the president's intentions whether he would call an early presidential election, Rajapaksa said he decided to "leave the decision to the people" and recounted how he had asked crowds at events whether they wanted elections. Everyone supposedly put their hands up. Sampanthan said the president wanted elections as soon as possible before the "war crimes" issue got any more heated, GSP-Plus concessions expired, or the economy got any worse.

13. (C) On Fonseka, Sampanthan said the general would run and noted that the president would have to accept his resignation or be seen as "dishonorable." (NOTE: On November 12, Fonseka resigned his commission effective December 1, and the

president immediately accepted the resignation. Serving military officers are barred from participating in politics. END NOTE.) Sampanthan also recounted a disturbing conversation he recently had with the president's brother Basil Rajapaksa, who said matter-of-factly "Fonseka could be assassinated." Sampanthan said this remark, coupled with the recent decree by nationalist Buddhist monks against Fonseka running in the election and the fact that a Rajapaksa/Fonseka contest would "split the army," were "dangerous trends" and indicated that the election campaign would get "hot."

#### RECONCILIATION

14. (C) Sampanthan noted the president's willingness to meet with Sampanthan and other Tamils, but overall he was not sanguine about the Rajapaksas' commitment to reconciliation. They had stalled implementation of the 13th amendment and the election season would likely further reduce chances for putting the amendment into effect. Asked what other steps short of the 13th amendment would be important for reconciliation, Sampanthan noted the de-militarization of society and the elimination -- or at least reduction -- of checkpoints, which particularly impacted young Tamil men. Sampanthan also urged the elimination of the Emergency Regulations. With the end of the war and the complete defeat of the LTTE, Sampanthan thought there was no longer any justification for extraordinary measures.

#### DIASPORA CONFERENCE

15. (C) Sampanthan was nonchalant about a Tamil diaspora

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conference reported to be taking place soon, noting that it had already switched from London on November 12 to Zurich perhaps on November 19. Nevertheless, he said he often spoke to diaspora leaders, and recounted a conversation he had had that morning with unidentified Tamil leaders in California who were interested in getting involved in economic development and reconstruction of the war-ravaged Sri Lankan north and east. These leaders encouraged him to plan a trip to the U.S., which he was eager to do soon.

16. (C) Sampanthan said he wanted to meet with the U.S. diaspora to stress with them the need to be pragmatic and not extreme in finding a political solution to the plight of Tamils, and to encourage them to become more involved in reconstruction and economic development. We encouraged him both in making the trip and in pursuing these goals.

#### COMMENT

17. (C) The Sri Lankan Tamil community, of which Sampanthan is now probably the most prominent member, could play an important role in any upcoming election, whether presidential or parliamentary. If Fonseka runs against Rajapaksa in a presidential contest, the Sinhala vote could be evenly split, making every vote count -- including those of the Tamil community. Although Tamils initially were dead-set against Fonseka, given his past statements defending Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, we have begun to hear some express willingness to support the general against what many regard as the very corrupt Rajapaksas. Fonseka himself appears aware of the potential of this constituency and added the Rajapaksas poor treatment of IDPs and failure to move ahead on national reconciliation to his list of complaints in his resignation letter.

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